



News release

Spring is high season for ticks

Beware of canine babesiosis

Leverkusen – The tick season has begun. Now that temperatures are rising, ticks are once again gathering in grass and shrubs, waiting for any warm-blooded creature to come along. These blood-sucking parasites are more than just unpleasant, they can also transmit dangerous disease-causing pathogens in their saliva. One such disease is canine babesiosis, also known as biliary fever.

The parasite that causes babesiosis originates in the tropical and subtropical regions of the world, but it has spread to other parts of the world through the various species of tick that carry it. In France, babesiosis is the most-feared canine disease; every year, 400,000 new cases are reported. There have also been reports of babesiosis in Germany in the last ten years, while the first cases in the Netherlands were reported in 2004. Infected dogs or ticks remain attached to dogs bringing the disease and the pathogen into regions where they were previously unknown. Climatic changes have also contributed to making it possible for parasites to inhabit regions in which they would have had no chance of survival a few years ago. In this way, babesiosis has progressed from being a disease suffered by travelers into a common disease in Central Europe.

In Central Europe, the marsh tick is regarded as the most dangerous carrier of babesiosis. This tick is larger and more colourful than other species. It is approximately 5 millimeters large while unfed, but can measure up to 16 millimeters after it has successfully completed its blood meal. Females have a white shield with dark spots on the front of their backs, while on male marsh ticks this shield covers the entire back. Marsh ticks are frequently found in France, northern Spain,



northern Italy and Croatia, and have also occurred in large quantities in Germany in recent years. In southern Europe, another tick species, the Brown Dog tick plays a larger role. This tick may be prevalent during all seasons of the year. It is rarely found in Germany - usually only as a “souvenir” of a vacation.

The causative agents of babesiosis are single-cell blood parasites called *Babesia canis*, which destroy the red blood cells. They inhabit the tick's saliva glands and are transmitted when the tick feeds on blood. Infected dogs frequently exhibit the first signs after one week. Clinical signs include high fever (up to 42 °C), listlessness, weakness, pale or yellowish mucosa, reddish or brownish urine and jaundice. The disease is often only diagnosed when the urine appears darker due to the excretion of hemoglobin after the destruction of the red blood cells. Once there is massive infestation of the red blood cells it may be difficult to save the dog's life.

The main objective is therefore to protect dogs against the risk of infection. Spot-on antiparasitic products, such as Advantix[®] Spot-on, that repel and kill ticks and other parasites, like mosquitoes or sand flies before they can bite and initiate their blood meal are now available. The combination of repellent and killing properties of an ectoparasiticide decreases the likelihood of pathogen transmission and thus prevents dogs from life-threatening diseases such as babesiosis. Dogs should therefore be treated at regular intervals of at least four weeks throughout the tick season.

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Leverkusen, April 04, 2006
(hb) (2006-04-180e)

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